



# City of Seattle

## Department of Planning and Development

Diane M. Sugimura, Director

### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Councilmember Richard Conlin, Chair, PLUS Committee  
Councilmember Tim Burgess  
Councilmember Mike O'Brien

**FROM:** Diane M. Sugimura, Director

**DATE:** January 17, 2013

**SUBJECT:** DPD 2012 Year End Report

We wanted to share with you a high level summary of some of the many 2012 activities in the Department of Planning and Development. The City Planning discussion will be in a separate memo ... the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter work plan report. Thank you.

#### Summary of Permit Activity

2012 turned out to be quite a year. Development activity picked-up faster than we had anticipated. In the end, overall construction permits for the year were valued at \$2.4 billion, a 25% increase over 2010 (\$1.9 in 2010; \$2.0 billion in 2011). For overall construction permit revenues, 2012 was the third highest year, only surpassed by 2006 and 2007, which had been pretty much off the charts. Master Use Permit applications continue to increase, from a low of 356 in 2010 to 517 in 2012. However, this is still significantly lower than our high of 1,121 in 2007. As we have all heard, housing, apartments in particular, saw a real growth spurt. We issued construction permits for 10,179 housing units, for a net increase of 9,082 when demolitions are subtracted. The previous high had been 7,142 net units in 2007.

This of course made it challenging to keep our intake appointment timelines reasonable, and to maintain our review targets. Staff have worked extremely hard to balance workload with available resources, and to make adjustments to accommodate our customers' needs. Overall we generally met or were within a week of our goals.

- |   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|
| • 48 hour initial review (goal = 80%):                  | 89%                     |
| • 2 week initial review (goal = 80%):                   | 40%; 92% within 3 weeks |
| • 4 week initial review green residential (goal = 80%): | 59%; 92% within 5 weeks |
| • 6 week initial review green non-res (goal = 80%):     | 37%; 79% within 7 weeks |
| • 8 week initial review (goal = 80%):                   | 79%; 92% within 9 weeks |
| • 120-day MUP total review (goal = 80%):                | 72%                     |
| • 120-day construction total review (goal = 90%):       | 95%                     |



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Electronic Plan (E-Plan) review has certainly helped us keep up with the workload. As you may recall, we initially conducted a pilot with a limited number of applicants. Over time we learned from them, and made improvements. At this time, E-Plan is generally available to all applicants who choose to submit electronically. By the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2012, about 40% of construction application intake appointments were conducted electronically. This helped us keep our intake appointments to a fairly reasonable timeline.

### **Code Compliance 2012 Summary**

In 2012 the Code Compliance Division received 4,792 complaints, up five percent from 4,565 in 2011. The greatest increase came in Noise complaints, which went up by slightly over 50%. Perhaps more significant, however, was the increase in Housing Code complaints: up 12% to 621 complaints, a record high. We believe this is related to increased visibility of our housing code program stemming from adoption of the Rental Registration and Inspection Ordinance (RRIO).

Of the total 4,792 complaints received, 1994, or 42% became “cases” where we determined a violation existed and pursued either voluntary or enforced compliance. In addition, the division pursued 148 cases related to tenant relocation assistance or just cause evictions. Total cases for the year came to 2,142. Housing code cases (situations where violations were found) increased by almost 25% compared to 2011.

The division met its official targets for investigating complaints within one, five or ten days, for emergency orders, construction complaints and non-construction complaints, respectively. We also resolved nearly 80% of all cases within 90 days. Over the course of 2012, we referred 97 cases to the law department. Of those, we were able to close 26 cases. An additional 93 cases from prior years were also closed in 2012.

Our longer term (four year) records do reflect a drop in cases between 2010 and 2011, which is largely explained by the fact that due to staffing cuts, the division stopped enforcing on all but the most serious weed complaints. The past two years, however, are showing an increase in complaints and cases.

Some points of interest from the summary numbers and other highlights from our inspection and enforcement actions include the following:

1. Average time to resolve cases in 2012 (62 days) dropped by about a third from the average of the three prior years (98 days).
2. Warning notices continue to have a strong effect on weed violations, as only 24 weed citations were issued out of 182 cases where violations were found.
3. Shoreline complaints and cases were almost constant over the past two years: just over twenty complaints and nine or ten cases with violations.

4. Two ongoing code compliance issues relate to bed bugs and roosters. Both types of complaints rose in 2012. Bedbug complaints went from 26 to 44; rooster complaints increased from 84 to 92.
5. Applications under the Tenant Relocation Assistance Ordinance increased this year, as has happened in other years when development activity is on the rise.
6. Since mid-2011 DPD has received complaints on about 17 medical marijuana businesses. DPD evaluates whether the facilities are in compliance with zoning and use restrictions for their particular site. Of the seventeen, seven dispensaries were operating in an appropriate location and no violation was present. Three subsequently obtained permits and are now operating in accordance with the Land Use Code. Four businesses closed or relocated as the result of enforcement action. The remaining three still have open cases and are seeking permits.

Complaint Intake								
Year	Const	Noise	Weeds	Zone	Shore -line	House	Unfit/ Vacant	TOTAL
2009	992	194	1,243	1,831	44	527	342	5,173
2010	958	200	1,364	1,538	30	535	309	4,934
2011	953	212	1,094	1,484	22	554	246	4,565
2012	950	322	1,272	1,344	21	621	262	4,792
<b>TOTAL</b>	3,853	928	4,973	6,197	117	2,237	1,159	19,464

Cases Created										
Year	Const	Noise	Weeds	Zone	Shore- line	House	Unfit/ Vacant	Reloc/ Evict	Other	TOTAL
2009	464	8	893	1,278	34	283	218	144	10	3,332
2010	412	24	1,025	1,126	17	285	171	100	8	3,168
2011	445	8	156	905	9	262	157	111	4	2,057
2012	406	37	182	782	10	326	222	148	29	2,142
<b>TOTAL</b>	1,727	77	2,256	4,091	70	1,156	768	503	51	10,699

### Staff Resources

With the workload clearly increasing, people often ask ... have you been able to increase your staff? After going through huge layoffs several years ago, it is great to be able to report that we've been busy with hiring processes. Our very small Human Resources unit has been

tremendous. In 2012, we were able to reinstate 25 former DPD employees, and hire an additional 18 staff. Overall, we added about 16 positions; the rest were filling vacancies due to retirements, moves or other reasons. In the coming year, we anticipate filling another 18-20 positions related to the Operations division.

### **Improving DPD's Website**

In 2012 DPD staff began to develop a new version of the public website – City of Seattle/dpd. To improve usability, we are redesigning and reorganizing our online presence. Over time, the website has accumulated a great deal of useful information, but we have heard concerns about challenges of navigating through so much information. As we continue to move more department services on-line, it is particularly important that our website be as easy to use as possible. In addition to a simpler look, more logical organization, better search function, and an improved interactive map, we are re-writing much of our introductory text in “plain language.” Our goal is to launch the new version of our website near the end of the first quarter of 2013.

### **Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI)**

The department has initiated a variety of RSJI programs. Some examples include integrating the RSJ objectives and outcomes City Planning's work as project plans are developed for new work items. We also continue to push more broadly with our outreach and engagement, reaching communities that have traditionally not participated, particularly in our planning processes. The RSJ filter is being applied to the RRIO program as each step of the program is developed.

We have also conducted several sessions of both the *DPD Hiring Process* and *Cultural Competency Training*. This is mandatory training for anyone participating in a DPD hiring process, helping to ensure that our processes are fair and equitable. Also popular this past year were brown bag sessions on *Stand Your Ground* laws in Washington State. Employees who are in the field daily appreciated learning what the laws are and clearly heard DPD's message: our number one priority is to be safe; always remove yourself from possible dangerous situations.